

environment

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Nature Conservation Action Strategy— What is different about it?

The Action Strategy for Nature Conservation in the Pacific Islands Region 1999–2002 embodies a collective responsibility pledged by the stakeholders of the Pacific region’s environment to care for it. It reflects the reality of the environment being part of everyone and is everyone’s responsibility.

The collective ownership of the Action Strategy and what it entails is emphasised as it summarises the views of key stakeholders, including representatives of community, national, regional and international groups.

Joe Reti, SPREP’s Head of Conservation and Natural Resources Divisions said that, in previous strategies, people thought SPREP owned the Action Strategy and hence is responsible for the implementation of what the strategy proposed. Mr Reti was adamant that the strategy is not a SPREP-only initiative.

Mr Reti said, “The strategy belongs to everyone, this is what is different about this one. It represents the concerns for the environment and a commitment to action for its protection by all

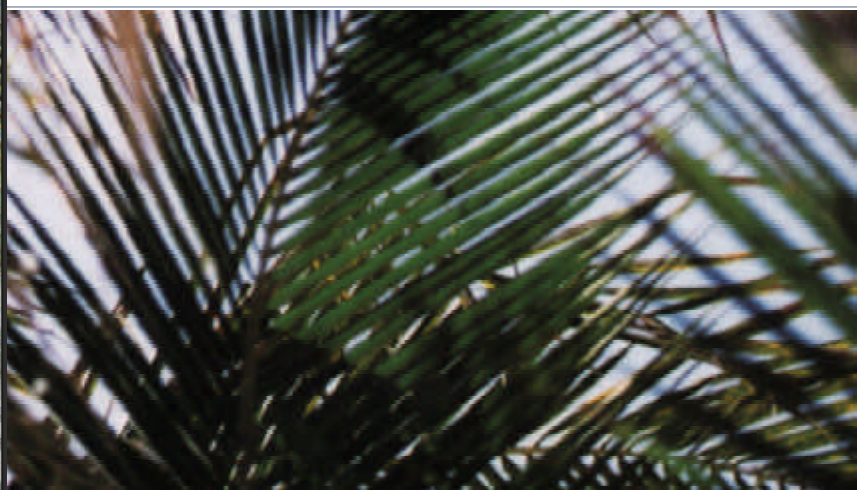
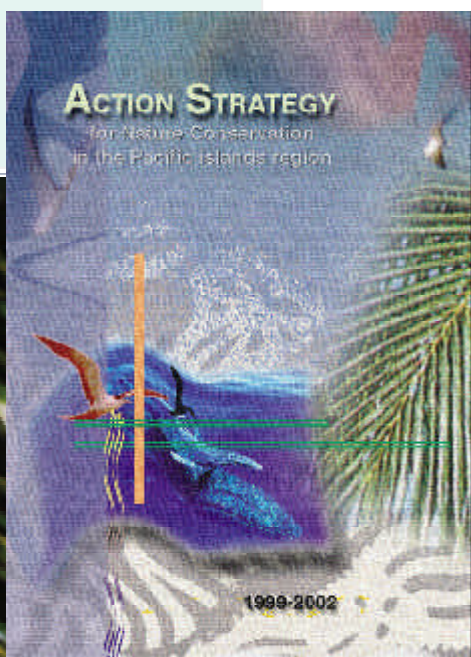
the countries of the region and various international organisations”. These include: UNESCO, the University of the South Pacific (USP), World Conservation Union (IUCN), World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Foundation for the Peoples of the South Pacific– International (FSPI).

The role of SPREP is to facilitate the processes for updating the strategy and reporting on its progress as well as providing resources where possible.

Another different aspect of this strategy is the addition of the four new areas on:

- Protecting intellectual property rights and ownership and access to genetic resources.
- Preventing and controlling invasive species (marine, freshwater and

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Pacific Endorses Environment Management System

To manage the Pacific's natural resources in a sustainable way, there is a need to develop a 'Pacific' system. A successful system would need to integrate the use of traditional environmental management practices with the normal processes within Pacific governments and community life. The Tenth SPREP meeting endorsed such a potential system for implementation.

Traditional practices and customs within the Pacific have allowed many communities to live in a subsistence lifestyle. However, population growth and economic development has led to disruption of living systems and individual species. The Pacific island countries face the challenges of taking on economic development as the only option for surviving in the increasingly globalised trading environment while at the same time, trying to integrate their traditional way of life.

To initiate the development of an integrative system, the Capacity Building for Environmental Management in the Pacific (CBEMP) project aims to mix traditional local knowledge of managing the environment with new environmental management approaches.

The CBEMP, a UNDP funded and SPREP executed initiative sought the input of a wide range of people, from traditional healers to government officials, in order to establish each country's priorities for environmental management.

The collection and storage of information about how people manage their forest areas and marine resources traditionally; and how to develop sustainable forms of tourism will be the area of focus during the initial stages of the project.

Mr Craig Wilson, the Project Manager of

CBEMP said, "The information would be used to increase the awareness of the range of ways to manage the environment, targeting both the decision-makers and the wider community". Countries will then be able to identify potential income generating projects, which make use of both old and new systems of environmental management.

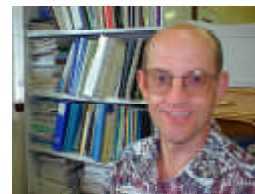
At the end of the CBEMP project, countries should have:

- People trained to collect information on traditional resource management practices.
- Established databases on traditional knowledge and have people trained to access the information for government and community use.
- Decision makers at the government and community level who are more aware of the importance of resources at the policy level and for hands-on

utilisation at the community level.

- Increased the capacity of PICs to prepare education resource materials for schools to increase the awareness of students.
- Increased the capacity to ensure that certain aspects of traditional knowledge are incorporated into national legislation.
- Identified potential demonstration projects that will utilise aspects of traditional knowledge, encourage community participation and promote income generation.

The CBEMP project was presented at the Tenth SPREP Meeting for member countries to note the project approach and provide guidance for the Secretariat in its efforts to attract financial resources for implementing its activities. The US encouraged SPREP to pursue its partnership with US Peace Corps to implement activities. The meeting also encouraged SPREP to seek additional financial resources.



Craig Wilson, Project Manager, CBEMP.



Traditional food making in the Fiji islands. A skill and knowledge of local flora that needs to be documented

Photo by Paddy Ryan

From the Director's Desk



Mr Tutangata,
Director of
SPREP

As a ten-year-old I used to look at the sea with awe; at the seemingly endless supply of fish that I could harvest with my bare hands to feed my family. Now, when I look at it, I wonder how far into the new millennium we will be before it overwhelms our coasts.

The world seems increasingly intoxicated with the promises of the new millennium. But as we are bombarded with more and more information about the millennium celebrations, I find myself asking: what is there for us to celebrate?

What is there to celebrate if the Northern Group islands of the Cook Islands, or the many islands of Kiribati, Tokelau, Tuvalu, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Marshall Islands are to disappear beneath the ocean?

The Pacific's 22 countries and territories are strung out across 30 million square kilometres of ocean. They contain some of the most diverse ecosystems on Earth, and are inhabited by cultures that have lived harmoniously in an often difficult and fragile environment for millennia - longer than Germanic or Slavic peoples have lived in Europe, or Anglo-Saxons in Britain.

Pacific island countries have contributed just 0.06 per cent to global greenhouse gas emissions. Yet now, changing climate and sea levels, linked to global warming, are affecting their water supply, food production, fisheries and coastlines.

At least two motu, or small islets, have already disappeared in Kiribati. The country's oral history, which goes back thousands of years, says that one of them, Tebua Tarawa, was the first motu to be formed in the Tarawa lagoon. Until a decade ago, fishermen used it as a resting-place; a place where they could beach their boats and harvest coconuts to slake their thirst. Then the coconut trees disappeared, then the sand banks, and now the fishing boats skim over it as it lies beneath the waves. Abanuea, known locally as 'the long-lasting beach', has also disappeared beneath the rising seas.

In Tuvalu, the oceans are similarly reclaiming the motu of Tepuka Savilivili.

Its once extensive sand banks have also disappeared, its coconut trees have gone, and the ocean is slowly moving up its remaining rock.

Over the past five years, the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) and the National Tidal Facility at Flinders University in Australia have established sea-level monitoring stations across the Pacific. Preliminary results show a sea-level rise of up to 25 millimetres per year - well above the global estimate of a 2-millimetre annual rise made by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Satellite data have validated these findings, and shown a 20 to 30-millimetre per year sea-level rise in a region stretching from Papua New Guinea southeast to Fiji.

This accelerated sea-level rise is thought to be linked mainly to the El Niño weather phenomenon, which has become markedly more frequent and intense over the past two decades. El Niño brings stronger storm surges to the Pacific and it is these, coupled with the underlying sea-level rise, that have swamped Kiribati's motu.

Both in 1997 and 1998, unusual storm surges in Kiribati and the Republic of the Marshall Islands saw the tide just

continuing to rise. Sea walls, bridges, causeways and roads were destroyed; houses and plantations were flooded.

Coastal erosion is now a continuing problem in most low-lying Pacific islands. Some of it, in more populated areas, can be blamed on inappropriate land-use practices, but this is not the whole story. Coasts of outer islands that have seen no development are also eroding.

The recent changes in climate and sea level are also creating major problems for water supplies and food production in the Pacific. Last year, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, the Marshall Islands, Papua New Guinea, Samoa and Tonga were all hit by devastating droughts. Fiji's sugar cane production, which normally provides 40 per cent of its export earnings, fell by two-thirds. Tonga's squash crop, which produces about half of its export earnings, was more than halved. In Papua New Guinea, Australia spent more than AU\$30 million delivering food to people in isolated areas of the highlands and low-lying islands, many of whom were close to starvation. In the

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Photo by Peter Bennett

Pacific Environmental Education and Training Strategy

Environmental education and training in the Pacific need to work very closely with Pacific island institutions and private sector in order to use resources from these areas to enhance activities.

This was the recurring theme from the outcomes of the SPREP coordinated Environmental Education and Training Conference held in Suva, Fiji. The US urged SPREP to make efforts to further develop private sector linkages and to use resources from this area in its activities. The conference further requested SPREP to recognise the roles and to work collaboratively with the South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC) and the University of the South Pacific (USP). Furthermore, SPREP should continue to develop performance indicators in the strategy and to continue efforts to attract financial support for implementing its activities.

The objectives of the conference were to:

- education efforts and assess the role of regional bodies in furthering environmental education and training efforts.
- Exchange current environmental education materials and experiences, identifying commonalities, assets, needs, and challenges.
- Develop a Regional Strategy for ongoing environmental education and training activities.
- Create an Environmental Education and Training Network.



The banner, the faces, the skills—the Education Strategy will help coordinate training in the Pacific.



The objectives of the conference were achieved and a draft Action Strategy for Environmental Education and Training in the Pacific Region 1999–2003 was put together and circulated within the region for additional input.

Further information can be obtained by contacting:

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Nature Conservation Action Strategy



terrestrial) and genetically modified organisms

- Capacity building with measurable impacts
- Ratification of conventions that may facilitate or support conservation in the region

The Action Strategy identifies the most critical issues in nature conservation facing the region and suggests the most urgent actions required at the local, national, and regional levels.

The key players involved in implementing the Action Strategy include the environmental, planning and development agencies in each country and

territory; individual and community resource owners; regional and international organisations (NGOs) including churches, women's and youth groups; and formal and informal community leaders and groups. The meeting endorsed and supported the Action Strategy.

Further information can be obtained by contacting:

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Pacific Island Countries turn up the Heat in the Climate Negotiations

After reviewing the paper presented by SPREP's Climate Programme on "Climate Change Negotiations", the SPREP Meeting emphasised that Pacific island countries continue to seek the early entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol. This should be done to ensure that the intended 5.2% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions is achieved, and to continue the call for stronger emissions reduction from the industrialised countries.

The SPREP Secretariat believes that the convention (UNFCCC) process alone is not enough to reduce global emissions of greenhouse gases to levels that will have minimal impacts on this region. Hence it is important to place effort on the development and the transfer of environmentally sound technologies, and securing international commitment to energy conservation and efficiency require-

ments for the development of renewable energy sources that can be used. The US supported this need for the Pacific islands to consider a regional policy on investing in renewable energy.

SPREP was strongly encouraged to advise its member countries of the work of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), set up to collectively voice the

concerns of small islands in international negotiations.

Furthermore, the Meeting called for adequate resources to be made available through the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and for donors to address adaptation needs.

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From the Director's Desk

Federated States of Micronesia, almost 40 atolls ran out of water and Pohnpei, was reduced to living off brackish underground supplies.

The rising sea levels are also seeping into the soils of low-lying atolls and making them too salty for the root crops that are the islanders' staple foods. People who for millennia have grown taro, pulaka or yams in poor soil by planting them in pits of compost are now having to radically change their methods of cultivation. Many people in Funafuti, Tuvalu, for example, are now growing their taro in compost in old kerosene cans.

Other changes are also being observed across the Pacific. Fisheries are altering: ocean currents have changed, and so have the locations of the fish. Traditional knowledge that has long enabled communities to find fish - their main source of protein - no longer holds true. Meanwhile malaria is taking hold in the highlands of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, where previously it was too cold for the mosquitoes that carry the disease to survive.

Science has not yet decided whether the changes in the patterns of El Niño are a

result of climate change or simply a decadal variation. Up to the past decade, scientific research was only sparsely applied in the Pacific, and indications of present change are based largely on strong anecdotal evidence. But just as you do not tell a person staring at their blazing house that it is not burning because science has not yet agreed on the cause of the fire, so you cannot tell Pacific island countries that they should ignore the changes they are now experiencing.

The adverse events in the Pacific are the kind of impacts which the IPCC has told its people to expect as the climate changes. It would be foolhardy for any Pacific island country to ignore that advice.

Greenhouse gas emissions resulting from human activity have already committed the Pacific to an inevitable rise in sea level. An Australian Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) study has determined that the pollutants emitted up to 1995 have already built an inevitable 5 to 12-centimetre sea-level rise into natural systems, peaking in about 2020-2025. The CSIRO also considered how much the seas would be likely to rise if the world's nations met the commitments they made to reduce emissions in the Kyoto Protocol agreed

in December 1997, and then, in 2020, developed the technology to effectively cease all emissions thereafter. Under this, optimistic, scenario, the seas would rise by 14 to 32 centimetres by about 2050.

This is worrying for low-lying Pacific island countries, many of which are only 1 to 2 metres above sea level. It fuels their disappointment that countries have so far failed to meet even the minimal commitment they made under the Climate Convention agreed at the 1992 Earth Summit, to return their emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2000. They know that, in fact, the IPCC has estimated that cuts of the order of 60 to 80 per cent will be needed if global warming is to be stopped.

Pacific island countries have led the way, under SPREP's Pacific Islands Climate Change Assistance Programme (PICCAP), in establishing their vulnerability to climate change as well as options to help them reduce it. But committed global action remains their main hope. The sooner the countries start implementing the reductions they have committed themselves to making - and accept that much stronger cuts will be needed - the better will be the Pacific's chances of surviving the next millennium.

Pacific Year of the Coral Reef (PYOCR)—A Success

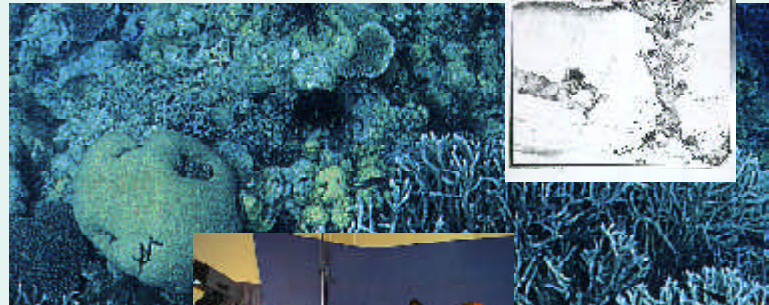
The Pacific Year of the Coral Reef campaign has a number of success stories. In particular, the campaign increased awareness of a large number of people on the importance of corals as living communities. Corals are slow growing and fragile, yet provide bountiful goods and services that sustain many lives in the Pacific.

Success of the campaign has led to positive action like the following:

- Communities declaring reef reserves and marine protected areas.
- Local dive operators in countries with thriving tourist industries have started teaching tourists and villagers about what to do and what not to do on a coral reef.
- The use of taboos and other traditional marine management systems have been reintroduced to allow coral reefs and associated marine life to rehabilitate and restock
- Students in many countries are doing beach and reef clean-ups including articles about the beauty and bounty of coral reefs in their school magazines.
- Across the region, the use of mobile theatres/plays/skits were found to be a successful means of conveying the coral reef conservation message.
- The Caribbean region has decided to adopt the Pacific Regional Campaign Plan, its campaign

slogan and key messages for their own Coral Reef campaign in 1998.

At the Tenth SPREP Meeting, a request was made to SPREP to encourage member participation in the International Tropical Ecosystems Management Symposium (ITMEMS), Townsville, Australia in November 1998.



SPREP may start the new millenium in its new headquarters to go up at the cool heights of Vaillima following approval from the meeting for the construction of the SPREP Headquarters Centre to proceed.

Construction of SPREP Centre to Proceed

The Tenth SPREP Meeting noted the status of the proposed construction and gave mandate to the Headquarters Taskforce to proceed as soon as sufficient funding was obtained. The Headquarters Taskforce has assisted the Secretariat in actively pursuing funding assistance with potential donors.

The Taskforce is satisfied that the actual cost of building the basic Centre would not exceed US\$1.7 million.



Head of Headquarters Taskforce H.E. Paul O'Callaghan arriving at current SPREP lodgings.

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History of SPREP

Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) at the Ministerial-level Conference on the Human Environment in the South Pacific, held in Rarotonga, Cook Islands, 8-11 March 1982.

This Rarotonga conference also adopted the South Pacific Declaration on Natural Resources and the Environment, and the Action Plan for Managing the Natural Resources and Environment of the South Pacific Region-the first SPREP Action Plan-and agreed on the administrative and financial arrangements needed to support the implementation of the Action Plan, and on the workplan for SPREP. This 1982 Rarotonga conference was modelled on the 1972 Stockholm conference that had launched the international environmental agenda, and gave real impetus to the push to establish a body to promote and coordinate environmental management in the South Pacific. It was at this 1982 Conference

on the Human Environment in the South Pacific that the name SPREP was born.

The legal framework which underpins SPREP's Action Plan was developed through four years of active negotiation between legal and technical experts from the South Pacific region. These negotiations resulted in the Convention for the Protection of the Natural Resources and Environment of the South Pacific Region and related protocols-the SPREP Convention-which was adopted on 25 November 1986.

The Convention is a comprehensive umbrella agreement for the protection, management and development of the marine and coastal environment of the South Pacific region. It lists the sources of pollution which require control: pollution from ships, dumping, land-based sources, seabed exploration and exploitation, atmospheric discharges, storage of toxic and hazardous wastes, testing of nuclear devices, mining and coastal erosion. It also identifies

environmental management issues requiring regional cooperation: specially protected areas, pollution in cases of emergency, environmental impact assessment, scientific and technical cooperation, technical assistance, and liability and compensation for damage resulting from pollution.

In the late 1980s it was decided that member governments should be more active in setting priorities for, and in managing, SPREP. This resulted in the disbanding of the Coordinating Group and its replacement with an annual (later biennial) meeting of environment officials from member governments as well as a smaller member country Steering Committee based on sub-regional representation. It was during these meetings of officials that the idea was first discussed for SPREP to become autonomous from SPC. One of the major reasons behind such autonomy was to better enable SPREP to capture international funding. The decision to move towards autonomy for SPREP was made in 1990, at the Third Intergovernmental Meeting on the SPREP Action Plan held in Noumea, New Caledonia. At the same meeting, the Government of Western Samoa (now Samoa) made its preliminary offer to host SPREP. This offer was accepted at the Fourth Intergovernmental Meeting on the SPREP Action Plan, Noumea, New Caledonia in 1991 and SPREP moved to Apia, Samoa, in January 1992, as part of its new independence.

SPREP's formal establishment as a stand-alone regional agency came with the Agreement Establishing the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme - the SPREP Agreement - which was opened for signature on 16 June 1993 and entered into force just over two years later, on 30 August 1995



The late Tofilau Eti Alesana then Prime Minister of Samoa signing the Agreement Establishing SPREP in 1993. The Agreement came into force in October 1995 when Niue became the tenth country to ratify. In attendance is Dr Vili Fuavao, Director of SPREP at the time.

SPREP's formal establishment as a stand-alone regional agency came with the Agreement Establishing the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme - the SPREP Agreement - which was opened for signature on 16 June 1993 and entered into force just over two years later, on 30 August 1995, following the tenth ratification by a member Government. Since then, five more Governments, of the 18 eligible to do so, have either ratified or acceded to the SPREP Agreement. This Agreement is now the organisation's cornerstone. It creates the legal basis for an autonomous, intergovernmental, regional organisation and defines the organisation's purposes as well as the respective functions of the SPREP Meeting and the Secretariat.

Pacific Environmental Agenda for the New Millennium set at the Tenth SPREP Meeting

The main focus of this issue of the newsletter is the Tenth SPREP meeting, held in Apia Samoa from 15 to 18 September 1998. It was officially opened by Samoa's then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, the Hon. Tuilaepa Sa'ilele Malielegaoi.

The SPREP Meeting is the biennial meeting of the governing body of the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP). Its main purpose is to provide advice, direction and endorsement as well as a review of its activities over the past two years.

The Tenth meeting decided and approved the intergovernmental agency's activities and directions for the new millennium.

The meeting involved sixty high-level delegates representing SPREP's 26 member countries and territories, the donor community, and agencies from the region and international arena.

The main outcomes and issues of concern to Pacific island countries discussed in the meeting are highlighted in the newsletter. These include a report from the Secretariat on its existing and proposed efforts to build the capacity of Pacific island countries to manage their natural resources in a sustainable manner; strategy on nature conservation; climate change negotiations; environmental education and awareness raising; pollution prevention; waste management; and coral reef protection.

Two other meetings were held in conjunction with the Tenth SPREP Meeting: to review the SPREP Convention

(Convention for the Protection of the Natural Resources and Environment of the South Pacific Region and related Protocols); and the Apia Convention (Convention on Conservation of Nature in the South Pacific Region).

The Meeting agreed to the offer by the Government of Guam to host the Eleventh SPREP Meeting. This will take place in October 2000.

Delegates and officials at the Tenth SPREP Meeting



History of SPREP

The seeds for an environment programme for the South Pacific region were sown in 1969 during a World Conservation Union (IUCN) symposium on nature conservation in the Pacific, held in Noumea, New Caledonia, when a call was made for an environmental agency for the Pacific.

Over the next decade, international and regional agencies gave their support to the concept of such an environmental agency, with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the South Pacific Bureau for Economic Cooperation (SPEC), now known as the Forum Secretariat, the South Pacific Commission, now known as the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), all joining in the development of what is now known as SPREP.

SPC started the process in 1974 with a project on "Conservation of Nature",

appointing a Regional Ecological Adviser. This adviser was given a broad brief to survey all the ecosystems in the South Pacific.

Consultations in 1975 between the SPC and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) led to the suggestion of organising a South Pacific Conference on the Human Environment. Also in 1975, the first Conference on National Parks and Reserves in the South Pacific, held in Wellington, New Zealand, provided a boost in terms of political support for a regional approach to environmental matters, and 1976 saw the signing of the Convention on Conservation of Nature

in the South Pacific (Apia Convention), calling for the protection of the Pacific's natural environment.

The South Pacific Forum, the political meeting of South Pacific countries, considered a Papua New Guinea/UNEP proposal for a comprehensive environmental management programme for the Pacific at its 1978 meeting in Nauru. It was subsequently agreed that this should be a joint programme of SPC and SPEC, but located at SPC Headquarters in Noumea, New Caledonia and guided by a Coordinating Group (made up of SPEC, SPC, ESCAP and UNEP), chaired by SPEC (now Forum Secretariat)

This agreement was formalised and led to the official birth of the South Pacific

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